

**Testimony of Leah W. MacSwords
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On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters**

**Before the House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture
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USDA Forest Service Centennial

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters, I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify today on the Centennial celebration of the USDA Forest Service.

The National Association of State Foresters is a non-profit organization that represents the directors of the state forestry agencies from the states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. State Foresters manage and protect state and private forests across the U.S., which together encompass two-thirds of the nation's forests.

This year the Forest Service is celebrating its 100th year of service to the citizens of this country. State Foresters have a long history of working cooperatively with the Forest Service – first in fire protection, and then expanding to forest management, wildlife habitat conservation, and protection of clean water. Looking back on this long relationship, it is clear that perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Forest Service during its first 100 years has been to bring a forest ethic to the all the forests in the nation by instituting a professional, scientific, and systematic approach to forest protection of all the nations' forests, regardless of ownership.

History of Cooperation

In 1911, Congress passed the Weeks Act, which authorized the purchase of land east of the Mississippi River to protect navigable waterways and their watersheds. This Act led to the purchase of burned-over and denuded land and the establishment of the eastern National Forests, which include the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky, the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia, and the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire. In addition, the Weeks Act established funding and direction for watershed programs and cooperative fire protection with the states on lands impacting navigable streams. The 1924 Clark-McNary Act further expanded these authorities by authorizing a federal grant program with the states for cooperative fire protection on all forestland across the country. The Act also established funding for states to implement reforestation and cooperative assistance programs for private landowners.

From its beginnings in the first quarter of the 20th Century to its culmination with the National Fire Plan, this country's wildland fire protection program – led cooperatively by the Forest Service and the state forestry agencies – is second to none in the world. Together, we have built up an institution of knowledge, skill, and experience that protects the nation's forests and grasslands from wildfire. Most recently, the National Fire Plan

has not only strengthened funding for wildland fire programs, but has also affirmed that the nation's wildland fire protection program is a cooperative effort across agencies and ownerships and serves all areas of the country.

After much debate, it was decided in 1919 that state forestry agencies, rather than the federal government, should have the legal responsibility for cooperative assistance and regulatory programs for private lands. Building from earlier authorities, the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 provided the Forest Service with broad and comprehensive authority to support the efforts of state forestry agencies to help the nation's 10 million private landowners manage and protect their forests. The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act has subsequently been updated and strengthened through the 1990, 1996, and 2002 Farm Bills. These cooperative programs support the educational, technical, and financial assistance to landowners to ensure that the public goals of sustainable forestry are realized. They include, among others, the Forest Stewardship Program, cooperative fire assistance grants, and the Urban and Community Forestry Program, and have established an excellent track record of protecting water quality, restoring fire-adapted forests, and managing wildlife habitat.

Changing Needs

Over time, the resource protection and management needs of private lands have changed. In the post-war era, many states focused their cooperative assistance programs on reforestation of lands that had been cut over to fuel the war and the subsequent building boom. The current programs in the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act are focused on the sustainable production of timber, protection of water quality, improvement of wildlife habitat, and conservation of working forests. While these factors are still important, the current suite of programs needs to be better integrated and targeted to achieve maximum outcomes across the landscape. These changes do not necessarily have to be made through changes to the legislation, but could instead be implemented by adjusting existing program regulations to meet the needs of the future.

As of today, there are 187 federal programs across all agencies that affect private forestland. While many of these programs are focused on issues other than forest management, there are still a number of programs throughout a variety of federal agencies that do have measurable effects on landowners. I urge the Committee to examine options for program consolidation that would help to better achieve overall program goals across the federal agencies.

The greatest hindrance to accomplishment of the Forest Service mission through assistance to states is lack of adequate funding. While we in the state and federal forestry arena are certainly not alone in loss of funding over the past several years, I believe that funding for the cooperative forestry programs has been cut especially heavy. In fact, some cooperative forestry programs have never received any funding. An example is the Watershed Forestry Assistance Program that was authorized in Title III of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. This program would provide states with the resources to undertake watershed forestry restoration projects in priority areas and to improve state forestry best management practices programs. Unfortunately, Congress has never

appropriated any funding for this program. A second example is the Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance Program (CPLFA). This program was originally funded under the National Fire Plan and focused on assisting communities with planning and carrying out hazardous fuels reduction work. Since its reauthorization in the 2002 Farm Bill, it has received no funding, undermining the ability of communities to carry out fuel reduction projects.

Greatest Challenges

Unlike private and state lands, management of the National Forest System has been slowed by regulations that, while well-meaning, often prohibited forest managers from carrying out projects in a timely manner. I have seen this happen many times in my state of Kentucky. In the late 1990s, many areas of Kentucky, including the Daniel Boone National Forest, experienced large outbreaks of the southern pine bark beetle, causing high levels of mortality in pine stands across the state. To further compound the problem, severe ice storms during the winters of 1999 and 2003 knocked down many more trees. This influx of downed timber in the forests created an abnormally high fire hazard that needed to be dealt with quickly.

The standard approach for forest managers to mitigate this type of hazardous situation is to quickly harvest and remove the downed and dead trees to both reduce the fire hazard and to naturally stimulate forest regeneration. Due to the excessive levels of analysis and bureaucracy that federal forest managers had to wade through, much of the dead and downed timber on the Daniel Boone National Forest decayed beyond the point of salvageable value by the time the agency was ready to complete the timber sale. In contrast, the Kentucky Division of Forestry completed several salvage timber sales on the state forests in the time that it took the Forest Service just to get their sales approved. Environmental impacts from the harvest, once completed, would generally be the same, regardless of ownership. However, the environmental risk on National Forest System lands has often been increased by delaying the harvesting and restoration work, thus increasing the fire danger. The state system of analysis has proven to be much more efficient and could serve as a model for federal lands management.

Congress passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) as a mechanism to streamline the approval process for forest restoration projects that focus on removing excess hazardous fuels, and to facilitate other restoration projects. The Act helps to put scientific forest management back in the hands of the professionals who know the resource best. NASF supports all titles of HFRA and we request the Committee's assistance to ensure that the agency is given the resources to successfully implement all six titles of the Act.

Forest Service Role in Leadership

The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act provides the Forest Service and – through cooperative agreement – the states with direction on the focus of the landowner assistance programs. Most of the landowner assistance programs in the Act are reauthorized every few years through the Farm Bill. Based on the lack of Congressional

support for many of the current landowner assistance programs, it is clear that a new approach to State and Private Forestry programs is needed.

At the NASF annual meeting last September, Chief Bosworth challenged the State Foresters to help the public understand the great benefit that can come from a few well-placed federal investments in state and private forestry. Chief Bosworth suggested we engage people who own or care about forests, water, and wildlife to help build a broader understanding of the work that landowners do to deliver the wide range of benefits that come from their lands and enhance the public good. Together with the Forest Service, NASF sponsored three meetings over the past few weeks to develop a shared understanding of public benefits from non-federal forestlands, to define what landowners and constituent groups want from non-federal forestlands, and to identify appropriate roles in assuring the sustainability of public benefits. The findings of these meetings, which we titled *Non-Federal Forestlands: Partnerships for the 21st Century*, will be available later this summer and will provide guidance to the Forest Service, NASF, and other stakeholders. State Foresters believe that a strong focus on providing clearly definable public benefits will better shape the future of state and private forestry. We will remain actively engaged to help lead the programs in this direction over time.

Research and development within the Forest Service has a long history of providing research to the broad array of forestry sectors, including the public, academic, and private sectors. As a partner with the Forest Service research programs, NASF places great value on the work being conducted at the six Forest Service research stations, especially the long-term research for which the agency is so well known.

One of the most valuable research programs the Forest Service conducts is the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program. This forest monitoring, inventory, and mapping program provides the entire forestry sector with comprehensive data on the status, condition, and trends of forests across the country. States use the data extensively and often work cooperatively with the Forest Service to gather the data. The FIA program is run out of the six separate research stations, resulting in differences in program implementation across the country. We applaud the Forest Service for its recent efforts to manage the program more consistently and encourage the agency to further these efforts.

The Forest Service also helps to support forestry research at land-grant colleges and universities through the McIntire-Stennis forestry research program, which provides dedicated funding for forestry research programs. The McIntire-Stennis funding is very important to maintaining research programs at many of these schools, and efforts to move the program to exclusively competitive grants would seriously undermine the long-term research now being conducted. Competitive grants work fine for two- or three-year research projects – commonly performed by graduate students – but fall far short of adequately addressing the needs of long-term or localized forestry research projects. I urge the Committee to maintain support for this program.

Conclusion

The state forestry agencies and the Forest Service have a long history of working together cooperatively. Many of the programs the states implement are funded and supported by the Forest Service, mainly through the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978. Therefore, State Foresters have a strong interest in the direction of the Forest Service as we embark upon this new century of our partnership.

I wish to close by reminding the Committee that the most compelling forces shaping the agency's role and direction with the states will not come from within, but rather from new and global issues that are already shaping our policy. Greenhouse gas markets, the increasing value of clean water, and global markets will all shape the agency's direction in the future. The strong relationship between NASF and the Forest Service will help state forestry agencies and the Forest Service to better serve the public as these changes begin to take place.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.